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Breaking Bad: New Directions for Leader Personality Research in Foreign Policy Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article considers how leaders' personality traits change over time. I focus on how leaders become more authoritarian, overconfident, and more mistake-prone; how, when, and why do leaders 'break bad'? Temporal evolution of leaders is an important topic given the long tenure of many political leaders and the influence these leaders have over policies, including foreign policies. There is very little work on how leaders' personalities develop and how they interact with changing constraints and opportunities. This article is an agenda-setting review, designed to push Foreign Policy Analysis in new directions. This is especially important given the resurgence in research on personalities and the renewed interest in leaders. Drawing on diverse and multi-disciplinary scholarship on the psychological effects of aging, experience, learning, and power-holding, this article develops expectations about leader personality change. I discuss challenges for research in this area, focusing on how 'bad' can be conceptualized, and offer specific avenues for future investigations.

‘Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.’¹

Fidel Castro led Cuba for more than half a century, Chiang Kai-shek ruled the Republic of China for 48 years, and Kim Il-sung led North Korea for 45 years. Currently, long-serving leaders include Cameroon’s Paul Biya (over 38 years), Cambodia’s Hun Sen (over 35 years), Iran’s Al Khamenei (over 31 years), Russia’s Vladimir Putin and Syria’s Bashar al-Assad (each over 20 years), Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan (over 17 years), and Germany’s Angela Merkel and Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu (each over 14 years). These leaders have had incredible potential to impact the foreign policies of their countries.² From a long record of research, we know that leaders, in both democracies and authoritarian states, shape the intentions and strategies of their states and are themselves an important part of their countries’ diplomatic capabilities.³ Researchers have moved beyond the argument that leaders matter, instead focusing on how leadership and leaders’ characteristics – including their perceptions, how they represent problems, and their cognitive biases -- shape states’ foreign policies.

In this article, I am interested in how leaders’ personalities change over time. Personalities are patterned relationships among cognition, affect, motivations and orientations toward interpersonal relationships.⁴ While we might expect leaders’ personalities to be stable, leaders can and do change. Modern personality theory does not assume individuals remain constant⁵ – even the generally stable ‘Big Five’

¹ Lord Acton (19th century historian, politician, and writer) in letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 5 April 1887, published in John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence, eds., *Historical essays and studies* (London: Macmillan, 1907).

² This paper is focused on foreign policy, although the arguments could apply to domestic and other non-foreign policy contexts.

³ Numerous sources make this argument, including Daniel L. Byman, and Kenneth M. Pollack, ‘Let us now praise great men: bringing statesman back in’, *International Security* 25:4, 2001, pp. 107-146; Margaret G. Hermann and Joe D. Hagan, ‘International decision making: leadership matters’, *Foreign Policy* 110:Special Edition, 1988, pp. 124-136; Bruce W. Jentleson, *The peacemakers: leadership lessons from twentieth-century statesmanship* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018).

⁴ Jerrold M. Post, ‘Assessing leaders at a distance: the political personality profile’, in Jerrold M. Post, ed., *The psychological assessment of political leaders* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp. 69-104, p.77.

⁵ Avshalom Caspi, Brent W. Roberts, and Rebecca L. Shiner, ‘Personality development: stability and change’, *Annual Review of Psychology* 56:1, 2005, pp. 453-84; David C. Funder, ‘Personality’, *Annual Review of Psychology* 52:1, 2001, pp. 197-221; Post, ‘Assessing leaders at a distance.’

personality traits change across a life span.⁶ Moreover, Hermann argues that the permanence of a trait across situations and time -- including time in office -- is itself a personality characteristic and varies across leaders.⁷

We know little about how, when and why leaders' personalities change. With few exceptions (reviewed below), most personality work on leaders has focused on a single point in time, not evolution. I am particularly interested in negative developments -- leaders who become more authoritarian, more distrustful and more insulated. How does hubris and over-confidence develop? When do leaders become less complex in their thinking? Why do leaders become more suspicious? What types of leaders are vulnerable to getting intoxicated on power? How, when, and why do leaders 'break bad'?

We might expect long-serving leaders to become better leaders, to 'break good'. After all, over time they become more experienced, politically seasoned, and have had opportunities to learn from prior mistakes. And indeed there are some political and personality-related psychological factors that support this expectation. Yet many of the psychological processes associated with leadership over time suggest that leaders can become less effective policymakers and engage in particular patterns of breaking bad. Kellerman summarizes it well: 'when leaders remain in positions of power...they acquire bad habits....[T]hey are increasingly prone to become complacent and grandiose, to overreach, to deny reality, and to lose their moral bearings'.⁸

The purpose of this article is to outline expectations for how leaders' personalities can change, based on previous scholarship. This is not an empirical investigation, but an agenda-setting review of a diverse set of literatures including research on foreign policy, international relations, political psychology, political leadership, organizational psychology, and business management. Given the lack of

⁶ Abigail J. Stewart and Kay Deaux, 'Personality and social contexts as sources of change and continuity across the life span', in Kay Deaux and Mark Snyder, eds., *The Oxford handbook of personality and social psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.1-41 [page numbers refer to online version].

⁷ Margaret G. Hermann, 'Explaining foreign policy behavior using the personal characteristics of political leaders', *International Studies Quarterly* 24:1, 1980: 7-46; Margaret G. Hermann, 'Assessing leadership style: trait analysis', in Post, *The psychological assessment*, pp. 178-212.

⁸ Barbara Kellerman, *Bad leadership: what it is, how it happens, why it matters* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), p.233.

research on how leaders change, it is important to bring together and draw from scholarship that can inform why and how leaders break bad. More specifically, I draw on four areas of research – the psychological effects of ageing, experience, learning, and power-holding – to develop ideas for investigating changes in leaders over time. I then discuss some of the challenges and possibilities for research in this area, focusing on how ‘bad’ can be conceptualized and operationalized along three ‘tiers of badness’. I conclude with some specific avenues for future investigation on this important topic.

My focus is on how all leaders may be susceptible to ‘break bad’—although of course all do not. I am not interested here in how some personalities may be more likely than others to change over time. This article also does not discuss very important contextual features, such as the institutional power and authority of the leadership position, the pathway to leadership, stressful situations, regime type, cultural practices, the time period and prevailing normative expectations about leadership, the nature of leader-follower relations and the types of groups and advisors around the leader. Contextual features undoubtedly contribute to leaders breaking bad, but the focus, of this article is on the micro-foundations and psychological drivers that some research suggests can lead to breaking bad regardless of context. My aim is to highlight and clarify these psychological aspects, leaving the interactions between such leader changes and contextual conditions for future research.

Leaders over Time: Theoretical Foundations for New Research

Although most Foreign Policy Analysis research on the effects of leaders’ characteristics on foreign policy is static, taking a snapshot of a leader’s personality and explaining a single choice point, there is some compelling research from which we can draw expectations about how leaders’ personalities develop. Here, I review work on the effects of leaders’ ageing, acquisition of more experience, learning and belief change, and the psychological effects of holding powerful positions. These are related and complementary, not competing, drivers of changes in leaders’ personalities. Although not exhaustive, I selected these areas of research because, in my judgment, this diverse scholarship has great potential to advance this nascent research agenda. These areas are well-established with robust findings which are easily adapted to this article’s questions of how, when, and why leaders break bad.

Ageing

Age is one attribute of leaders that will certainly change over time as they remain in power. Not even the most powerful leader can escape ageing; all are vulnerable to known psychological effects of ageing and long-serving leaders may go through more than one life transition, including through young- to middle- to late-adulthood phases.⁹ Although ageing effects are separate from the issue of longevity, as leaders may come to power when they are already old, all long-serving leaders are susceptible to ageing effects.

Many political leaders are not young. The mean leader age in the LEAD dataset is 57 years.¹⁰ As Post and Robin put it: ‘political leadership is, after all, a middle-aged and old man’s game.’¹¹ Leaders’ age has been directly related to foreign policy outcomes. Horowitz, McDermott and Stam, for example, found that older leaders are more likely to initiate and escalate militarized disputes, in most regime types.¹² And former US President Obama warned about the effects of ageing leaders: ‘If you look at the world and look at the problems, it’s usually...old men, not getting out of the way....They cling to power, they are insecure, they have outdated ideas and...energy and fresh vision and new approaches are squashed.’¹³

Indeed, in the later stages of life -- the period of life review¹⁴ -- ageing leaders may be reluctant to let go of power. According to Post, ‘ageing dictators may increasingly come to see themselves as synonymous with their countries...and may be

⁹ Jerrold M. Post, ‘Personality profiling analysis’, in R.A.W. Rhodes and Paul ‘t Hart, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Ellis, Cali Mortenson, Michael C. Horowitz, and Allan C. Stam, ‘Introducing the LEAD data set,’ *International Interactions* 41:4, 2015, pp. 718-741.

¹¹ Jerrold M. Post and Robert S. Robins, ‘The captive king and his captive court: the psychopolitical dynamics of the disabled leader and his inner circle,’ *Political Psychology* 11:2, 1990, pp. 331-351, pp.331-332.

¹² Michael C. Horowitz, Rose McDermott, and Allan C. Stam, ‘Leader age, regime type, and violent international relations,’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49:5, 2005, pp. 661-685.

¹³ Barack Obama, quoted in Bill Chappell, ‘Barack Obama says women could solve many of world’s problems – which men have caused, National Public Radio, 16 December 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/12/16/788549518/obama-links-many-of-world-s-problems-to-old-men-not-getting-out-of-the-way?utm_campaign=npr&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_term=nprnews&fbclid=IwAR3dvXWGzOrJBxObrfGlqEcoqEtYF6GbKb8TvdXno1UG-wEmCAJAAbD0tHk&t=1576873827130&t=1581677592954.

¹⁴ Stewart and Deaux, ‘Personality and social contexts’.

late in recognizing how much discontent has been brewing in their repressive policies.¹⁵ Post's research also shows that leaders may overcompensate for the ageing process,¹⁶ such as De Gaulle who increasingly 'behaved in an exaggerated fashion to reaffirm his mastery. The weaker he felt physically, the more secondary France seemed politically, the grander were his moves.'¹⁷

Horowitz, McDermott, and Stam offer a similar explanation for their finding that older leaders (in most regime types) are more likely to pursue conflict: 'older leaders may...be more likely to prefer to start and escalate militarized disputes than younger leaders because the older leaders have shorter time horizons.'¹⁸ Citing research on the psychological effects of time horizons and pressures on decision-making, they posit that 'older leaders, concerned about the creation of a legacy and uncertain how long they will remain in power....may be more likely to think in the short term. This time horizon bias may make the initiation and escalation of militarized disputes by older leaders relatively more likely since they will....attempt to build their legacies faster and therefore....accept riskier choices than they might otherwise.'¹⁹

Older leaders' shorter time horizons may be related to serious medical conditions associated with ageing.²⁰ According to Post and Robins, conditions such as arteriosclerosis, cancer, stroke, paranoia, depression and alcohol abuse -- more common in older individuals -- have afflicted many political leaders including Wilson, Mao, Stalin, Franco, and the Shah of Iran.²¹ These diseases may have even been caused or exacerbated by the stress of leading for a long period of time. Age-related disease may have severe psychological consequences, including rigidity in thinking, stubbornness, decline in intellectual capacities such as memory and judgment, increased emotional reactions and mood swings, apathy, and resurfacing and amplification of earlier personality traits. These and other effects may also come from

¹⁵ Post, 'Personality profiling analysis', p.7.

¹⁶ See, for example, Jerrold Post, 'On aging leaders: possible effects of the aging process on the conduct of leadership.' *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 6:1, 1973, pp.109-116; Jerrold Post, 'Dreams of glory and the life cycle: reflections on the life course of narcissistic leaders,' *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 12:1, 1984, pp. 49-60.

¹⁷ Post and Robins 'The captive king,' p. 340

¹⁸ Horowitz, McDermott, and Stam, 'Leader age', p.668.

¹⁹ Horowitz, McDermott, and Stam, 'Leader age', p.668.

²⁰ Horowitz, McDermott, and Stam, 'Leader age'.

²¹ Post and Robins 'The captive king.'

chemical treatments (prescribed or self-medicated) for underlying conditions.²² Fisher, Franklin and Post argue that, ‘based on the known neuroanatomical and neuropathological changes that occur with aging, we should probably assume that a significant proportion of political leaders over the age of 65 have impairment of executive function’, including diminishing task and goal selection, planning, cognitive flexibility and impulse control.²³ And even if leaders are not affected physiologically by disease, ‘the psychological impact of mortal illness can have major effects on the leader’s political behaviour and decision-making.’²⁴ Broader policymaking implications of leaders’ medical impairment may also surface as advisers may act to protect the leader in a conspiratorial delusion that nothing is wrong, or may attempt to take personal or political advantage of the situation.²⁵

Experience: From Novice to Expert

More time in office generates more political experiences for leaders. This includes both general political leadership experience and particular experiences that leaders have dealing with policy issues, political institutions, and other leaders. This experience can prompt cognitive and behaviour changes, as leaders may learn what works and what cues and demands from the environment are important.²⁶ In this article, I distinguish learning from experience (going from novice to ‘expert’) from learning that involves specific belief changes. While certainly related, they are grounded in distinct areas of research. Learning in terms of changes in beliefs will be covered in the next section. In this section, learning from more experience in a political position is captured by what Levy refers to as ‘deuteron learning’ in which individuals ‘learn how to learn. They learn new decision rules, judgmental heuristics, procedures and

²² Post and Robins ‘The captive king.’

²³ Mark Fisher, David L. Franklin, and Jerrold M. Post, Jerrold M., ‘Executive dysfunction, brain aging, and political leadership,’ *Politics and the Life Sciences* 33:2, 2014, pp. 93-102, p.100.

²⁴ Post and Robins ‘The captive king,’ p.339.

²⁵ Robert S. Robins and Jerrold Post, *When illness strikes: the dilemma of the captive king* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

²⁶ Margaret G. Hermann, ‘Ingredients of Leadership,’ in Margaret G. Hermann, ed., *Political psychology: contemporary problems and issues* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers 1986), pp. 167-192; Thomas Preston, *The president and his inner circle: leadership style and the advisory process in foreign affairs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

skills that facilitate their ability to learn from subsequent experience'.²⁷ Experience, for example, may transform leaders from 'foxes' who 'are open to multiple explanations for why any given foreign policy outcome occurred, and are apt to treat each foreign policy problem as unique'²⁸ into hedgehogs 'who deduce likely foreign policy outcomes and events from an overarching theory; they know one big thing, which they use to understand the world'.²⁹ Effects of experience have been detected at the neurological level. Hafner-Burton, Hughes, and Victor note experimental brain imaging research demonstrating distinct activation of brain regions for experienced decision-makers compared to novices.³⁰ Overall, we might expect that leaders with less initial political experience will change the most over time, with steeper learning curves.

General political experience gained over time can have both positive and negative effects on policymaking processes and outcomes. On the positive side, Saunders notes that 'experienced elites exhibit more strategic and cooperative behaviour, more effective use of heuristics, more effective playing of iterated games, and greater awareness of other players'.³¹ She demonstrates that during decision making prior to the Iraq war, President George W. Bush's minimal foreign policy experience showed in his delegation to others and his difficulty grasping relevant information or asking probing questions. This changed, Saunders argues, in his second term, after accumulating more experience.³² Hafner-Burton and colleagues also identify ways in which experience generally improves leader decision making (better risk management, less confrontational, and greater strategic awareness in negotiations),

²⁷ Jack S. Levy, 'Learning and foreign policy: sweeping a conceptual minefield,' *International Organization* 48:2, 1994, pp. 279-312, p. 286; see also Robert Jervis, *Perception and misperception in international politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p.20; and Stephen B. Dyson and Thomas Preston, 'Individual characteristics of leaders and the use of analogy in foreign policy decision making.' *Political Psychology* 27, 2006, pp. 265-288.

²⁸ Aaron Rapport, 'Cognitive approaches to foreign policy analysis', in Cameron G. Thies, ed., *The Oxford encyclopedia of foreign policy analysis* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.167-185, p. 175.

²⁹ Rapport, 'Cognitive approaches', p.175.

³⁰ Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, D. Alex Hughes, and David G. Victor, 'The cognitive revolution and the political psychology of elite decision making,' *Perspectives on Politics* 11:2, 2013, pp.368-86.

³¹ Elizabeth Saunders, 'No substitute for experience: presidents, advisers, and information in group decision making', *International Organization*, 71:S1, 2017, pp. S219-S247, p.S222.

³² Saunders, 'No substitute', p. S242.

illustrating this with changes in how G.W. Bush's administration dealt with North Korea in 2002 versus 2006.³³

Despite some positive effects of experience for leaders, there are some downsides. 'Experience can correlate with overestimating one's capabilities and/or underestimating an opponent, the difficulty of a task, or possible risks'.³⁴ Tetlock found that inexperienced 'foxes' were better at making predictions about international politics and updating their preconceptions after errors than are more expert 'hedgehogs'³⁵ and Hafner-Burton and colleagues similarly note that experienced leaders may focus too much on the 'deep logic' of a problem and ignore important 'surface features'.³⁶ U.S. President Johnson, for example, arguably did not update and reappraise his thinking after several years of dealing with the Vietnam war, U.S. President Clinton's 'deep logic' from his experience with Somalia may have contributed to his inaction in the Rwandan genocide, and Israeli military leaders' hedgehog-like expertise in air power may have constrained decision-making during the Second Lebanon War.³⁷ Experience may also prompt leaders to insert themselves more in the decision-making process and to rely less on advisors.³⁸ Putin, for example, appears to have changed from being an arbiter to a forceful advocate across time.³⁹ More involvement may make for effective leadership but it also may produce groupthink-like conformity to leaders who are directive and not impartial. Janis's analysis of Johnson's Vietnam 'fiasco' decisions is just one example showing the negative effects of biased leadership in the form of excessive concurrence-seeking in policymaking groups.⁴⁰

³³ Hafner-Burton, Hughes, and Victor, 'The cognitive revolution'.

³⁴ Saunders, 'No substitute', p.S222.

³⁵ Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert political judgment: how good is it? how can we know?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³⁶ Hafner-Burton, Hughes, and Victor, 'The cognitive revolution', p.370.

³⁷ Dominic D.P. Johnson, *Overconfidence and war: the havoc and glory of positive illusions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.152; Kellerman, *Bad leadership*; Asaf Siniver and Jeffrey Collins, 'Airpower and Quagmire: Historical Analogies and the Second Lebanon War,' *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 11:2, 2015, pp.215-231.

³⁸ Dyson and Preston, 'Individual characteristics'; Preston, *The president and his inner circle*.

³⁹ Tuomas Forsberg and Christer Puriainen, 'The Psychological Dimension of Russian Foreign Policy: Putin and the Annexation of Crimea,' *Global Society* 31:2, 2017, pp.220-244.

⁴⁰ Irving Janis, *Victims of groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

Learning: Changes in Beliefs

In addition to gaining more general experience in a position, the longer leaders stay in office, the more opportunities they have to change specific beliefs. For many psychological reasons, we would expect leaders' beliefs to remain stable. Psychological inhibitors include the need for consistency, information biases that reinforce existing beliefs, and attributions and social identity motives that reaffirm social categories and boundaries between self/in-group and others/out-groups.⁴¹ Despite these factors, leaders can change their beliefs and world views, the ways they represent problems, their fundamental assumptions, and their images of others.⁴²

Operational code analysis (OCA) captures leaders' general worldviews about their political environment and how best to interact with others, and OCA research has been at the forefront of examining changes in the content of leaders' beliefs across time.⁴³ Changes in operational codes have been found, for example, with Israeli Prime Ministers Rabin and Peres, China's General Secretary Hu Jintao, US President Bush, and Russian President Putin, with most leaders changing from seeing the political universe as more cooperative to more conflictual.⁴⁴ Not all leaders learn or change their beliefs. Malici and Malici, for example, found little change in the beliefs of Cuba's Fidel Castro and North Korea's Kim Il Sung after the end of the Cold war.⁴⁵

⁴¹ E.g., Jervis, *Perception*; Yaacov I. Vertzberger, *The world in their minds: information processing, cognition, and perception in foreign policy decisionmaking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Jonathan Renshon, 'Stability and change in belief systems: the operational code of George W. Bush from governor to second-term president,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, 2008, pp.820-849; Stephen B. Walker, Mark Schafer, and Michael D. Young, 'Profiling the operational codes of political leaders', in Post, *The psychological assessment*, pp. 215-245.

⁴² See, for example, Levy, 'Learning and foreign policy', p.283; Guy Ziv, 'Foreign Policy Learning' in Thies, *The Oxford Encyclopedia*, pp. 679-694.

⁴³ For overview, see Walker, Schafer, and Young, 'Profiling the operational codes'.

⁴⁴ Scott Crichlow 'Idealism or pragmatism: an operational code analysis of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres', *Political Psychology* 19:4, 1998, pp.683-796; Kai He and Huiyyun Feng, 'Xi Jinping's operational code beliefs and China's foreign policy', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6:3, 2013, pp.209-231; Renshon, 'Stability and change'; Stephen B. Dyson and Matthew J. Parent 'The operational code approach to profiling foreign political leaders: understanding Vladimir Putin,' *Intelligence and National Security* 33:1, 2018, pp.84-100

⁴⁵ Akan Malici and Johnna Malici, 'The operational codes of Fidel Castro and Kim-II Sung: the last cold warriors?', *Political Psychology* 26:3, 2005, pp.387-412; see also Stephen G. Walker, Mark Schafer and Michael D. Young, M.D. 'Presidential operational codes and foreign policy conflicts in the post-cold war world' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43:5, 1999, pp.610-625.

Other OCA research on belief change has examined what type of leaders learn, which beliefs are more likely to change, and what drives belief change.⁴⁶ Leaders may learn from past policy success or failure and belief changes are often connected to critical events to which leaders react.⁴⁷

Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) research has also examined changes in leaders' beliefs, although less so than OCA scholarship. LTA is a composite approach to leader personality that includes traits, motives, and beliefs, such as the belief in ability to control events. The few studies that have looked at LTA over time have generally confirmed the expectation that leaders' beliefs in the ability to control events are stable. Çuhadar and colleagues, for example, found stability for this belief when they compared three Turkish leaders across different time periods, as did Hermann in her analysis of Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Kesgin in his study of Ariel Sharon.⁴⁸ Other research, however, has found changes in leaders' belief in the ability to control events. Hermann, for example, compared U.S. President Clinton's profiles of his two terms in office and found this belief significantly higher in his second term.⁴⁹ Leaders with a strengthening sense in their control may become more willing to challenge constraints and more involved in decision making, yet not open to challenging information, unlikely to compromise and prone to poor quality decision making. They may also be more likely to pursue expansionist foreign policies.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See, for example, Samuel B. Robison, 'Experiential learning by U.S. presidents: domestic and international influences in the post-cold war world,' in Stephen G. Walker, Akan Malici, and Mark Schafer, eds., *Rethinking foreign policy analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp.189-204.

⁴⁷ Levy, 'Learning and foreign policy'; Preston, *The president and his inner circle*; Renshon, 'Stability and change'; Ziv, 'Foreign Policy Learning'.

⁴⁸ Esra Çuhadar, Juliet Kaarbo, Baris Kesgin, and Binnur Özkeçeci-Taner, 'Personality or role? comparisons of Turkish leaders across different institutional positions,' *Political Psychology* 38:1, 2017, pp.39-54; Margaret G. Hermann, 'Saddam Hussein's leadership style', in Post, *The psychological assessment*, pp.375-386; Baris Kesgin, 'Uncharacteristic foreign policy behaviour: Sharon's decision to withdraw from Gaza', *International Area Studies Review* 22:1, 2019, pp.76-92.

⁴⁹ Margaret G. Hermann, 'William Jefferson Clinton's leadership style.' in Post, *The psychological assessment*, pp.313-332.

⁵⁰ Stephen Benedict Dyson, 'Personality and foreign policy: Tony Blair's Iraq decisions,' *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2005, 3, pp.289-306; Hermann, 'Assessing leadership style'; Preston, *The president and his inner circle*; Mark Schafer and Scott Crichlow, *Groupthink vs. high-quality decision making in international relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

In addition to changes in belief content, leader learning may involve change in cognitive structure.⁵¹ Specifically, belief systems can become more simple or complex.⁵² Conceptual complexity is another personality characteristic in the LTA framework and some research has examined complexity over time. U.S. President Clinton, UK Prime Minister Thatcher and Iraqi President Hussein, for example, showed decreasing complexity over time.⁵³ Leaders with lower complexity tend to fit new information into their pre-existing simplified categories, prefer to act rather than plan or search for new information, restrict policy debate, and engage in more aggressive foreign policy.⁵⁴ Overall, OCA and LTA research on leaders suggests that more time in office may prompt changes in leaders' beliefs and cognitive architectures, and that these changes may underlie breaking bad.

Psychological Effects of Power

Being in power -- especially for a long time -- may change leaders' personalities in other, fundamental ways. Diverse areas of research suggest that power itself can affect leaders' traits, motives, and neurological processes. Growing distrust (doubt and wariness about others), one of the LTA traits, may lie at the heart of leaders' development toward more authoritarian (breaking bad) tendencies. The longer leaders play the political game, the more opportunity they have to make enemies – real or perceived – and the more time opponents have to mount challenges to their leadership. Turkish prime minister then president Erdogan's distrust has, for example, increased across his tenure.⁵⁵ Extreme levels of distrust may contribute to paranoia that has been

⁵¹ E.g., Levy, 'Learning and foreign policy'; Ziv, 'Foreign Policy Learning'.

⁵² Janice Gross Stein, 'Political learning by doing: Gorbachev as uncommitted thinker and motivated learner,' *International Organization* 48:2, 1994, pp.153-183; Guy Ziv, 'Simple vs. complex learning revisited: Israeli prime ministers and the question of a Palestinian state,' *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9, 2013, pp.203-222.

⁵³ Brian Dille and Michael D. Young, 'The conceptual complexity of presidents Carter and Clinton: an automated content analysis of temporal stability and source bias,' *Political Psychology* 21:3, 2000, pp.587-596; Stephen B. Dyson, 'Cognitive Style and Foreign Policy: Margaret Thatcher's Black-and-White Thinking,' *International Political Science Review*, 30:1, 2009, pp. 33-48. Hermann, 'Saddam Hussein's'.

⁵⁴ Hermann, 'Assessing leadership style'; Hermann, 'Explaining foreign policy'; Preston, *The president and his inner circle*; Dyson, 'Personality and foreign policy'

⁵⁵ Esra Çuhadar, Juliet Kaarbo, Baris Kesgin, and Binnur Özkeçeci-Taner, 'Examining leaders' orientations to structural constraints: Turkey's 1991 and 2003 Iraq war decisions,' *Journal of International Relations and Development* 38:1, 2017, pp.29-54; Aylin S. Gorener and Meltem S. Ucal 'The personality and leadership style of Recep

noted in some long-serving leaders, such as Stalin.⁵⁶ With growing distrust, we would expect leaders to have closed decision-making, hypersensitivity to criticism, intolerance for dissenting views, overall poor decision-making practices, and conflictual foreign policies, including the use of military force abroad for domestic diversion.⁵⁷

Leaders' motivations for serving office may also change during their rule. Winter uses motive theory to analyse leaders' needs for power, achievement and affiliation; these motives are also captured in two of LTA's characteristics (need for power and task orientation). Holding political power may actually increase leaders' power motivation, particularly for leaders who begin with high achievement motives. Winter notes that US President Clinton, originally high in achievement motive, became frustrated after the Democratic party's loss in 1994, lamenting 'I had done a lot of good, but no one knew it.'⁵⁸ Winter argues that Clinton's response to the party's electoral loss was a decline in achievement motivation and a rise in power motivation. Winter's comparison of political and business leaders suggests that frustration felt by achievement-motivated leaders, and their turn toward power motivations, may be distinct for those holding political positions.⁵⁹ Keltner's research on 'the power paradox' demonstrates that the way leaders come to power (by focusing on others, being affiliation-motivated) often changes after leaders come to power (into more power-motivated behaviours).⁶⁰ Leaders with high power motives tend to challenge constraints and prefer strong, forceful actions, including war.⁶¹

Tayyip Erdogan: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy', *Turkish Studies* 12:3, 2011, pp.357-381.

⁵⁶ Post, 'Personality profiling analysis.'

⁵⁷ Dennis M. Foster and Jonathan W. Keller, 'Leaders' cognitive complexity, distrust, and the diversionary use of force', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10:3, 2014, pp.205–223; Hermann, 'Assessing leadership style'; Schafer and Crichlow, *Groupthink*.

⁵⁸ Quoted in David G. Winter, 'Philosopher-king or polarizing politician? A personality profile of Barack Obama', *Political Psychology* 32, 2011, pp.1059-1081, p.1074.

⁵⁹ David G. Winter, D.G. (2010) 'Why achievement motivation produces success in business but failure in politics: the importance of personal control.' *Journal of Personality* 2010, 78:6, pp.1637-1667.

⁶⁰ Dacher Keltner, *The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence*. (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2016).

⁶¹ Hermann, 'Assessing leadership style'; Schafer and Crichlow, *Groupthink*; Winter, 'Philosopher-king'.

Being in power for a long time may also strengthen leaders' self-confidence, another LTA trait.⁶² With high confidence, leaders tend to act more consistently, 'not subject to the whims of contextual contingencies. They are neither the victims of events nor are they compelled to adapt to the nature of the situation....Information is filtered and reinterpreted based on their high sense of self-worth.'⁶³ Overconfidence can also induce more risk-taking behavior, including decisions leading to war, and poor policy performance.⁶⁴ Demir, for example, attributes negative aspects of Turkey's Syria policy after the Arab uprisings to overconfidence in the Turkish leadership.⁶⁵

Excessive self-confidence is part of what Owen and Davidson label the 'hubris syndrome'.⁶⁶ Symptoms of this syndrome also include narcissistic and messianic tendencies, feelings of omnipotence and being accountable only to 'history' or 'god', a drive for vindication, impulsiveness, and incompetence due to inattention to details and implementation. Owen and Davidson argue that hubris is an acquired syndrome, triggered by 'the possession of power, particularly power which has been associated with overwhelming success, held for a period of years and with minimal constraint on the leader...' and stress that 'hubris is acquired...over a period.'⁶⁷ They note that the development of hubris in leaders varies and that the onset and intensity of hubris may be influenced by external events, such as war or financial disaster.

Owen and Davidson also argue that while 'dictators are particularly prone to hubris because there are few...constraints on their behaviour',⁶⁸ democratic leaders are also vulnerable and repeated election victories may foster hubris. In their analysis of U.S. presidents and U.K. prime ministers, they note that some of these leaders demonstrated a steady progression of hubristic behaviour. They argue that 'Margaret

⁶² Hafner-Burton, Hughes, and Victor, 'The cognitive revolution'; Horowitz, McDermott, and Stam, 'Leader age'.

⁶³ Hermann, 'Assessing leadership style', p.195.

⁶⁴ Imran Demir, *Overconfidence and risk taking in foreign policy decision making*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; Johnson, *Overconfidence*; Schafer and Crichtlow, *Groupthink*.

⁶⁵ Demir, *Overconfidence*.

⁶⁶ David Owen and Jonathan Davidson, 'Hubris syndrome: an acquired personality disorder? a study of US presidents and UK prime ministers over the last 100 years,' *Brain: A Journal of Neurology* 132, 2008, pp.1396-1406; also see David Owen, 'Hubris and nemesis in heads of government,' *Journal of Social Medicine* 99, 2006, pp.548-551.

⁶⁷ Owen and Davidson, 'Hubris syndrome', p.1397.

⁶⁸ Owen and Davidson, 'Hubris syndrome', p.1397.

Thatcher...did not develop hubris syndrome until 1988, 9 years after becoming Prime Minister' and 'Tony Blair's hubris syndrome started to develop over NATO's bombing of Kosovo in 1999, 2 years after coming into office.'⁶⁹

The notion that hubris is acquired as a result of being in power has parallels with a large area of fairly recent research in social-, cognitive-, and neuro-psychology on the psychological effects of assuming positions of power. Overall, this 'sociocognitive research has demonstrated that power affects how people feel, think, and act.'⁷⁰ In her review of this research, Guinote concludes that although power can affect creativity and enhance cognitive strategies,

'[n]evertheless, power also licenses people to rely on gut feelings and heuristic information processing in domains that are deemed less important or when power holders feel confident and expert....Power can magnify the expression of common egocentric biases, increasing self-serving behavior. This is often accentuated by feelings of entitlement and deservingness. By increasing freedom to act at will and decreasing accountability, power tends to increase corruption. However, the links between power and corruption depend on personal predispositions and situational factors....'⁷¹

Related research suggests that power increases self-esteem,⁷² self-confidence,⁷³ concerns about threats and losses,⁷⁴ feelings of superiority,⁷⁵ the objectification and stereotyping of others,⁷⁶ and, linked to feelings of self-entitlement and legitimacy, the

⁶⁹ Owen and Davidson, 'Hubris syndrome', pp.1401-1402.

⁷⁰ Ana Guinote, 'How power affects people: activating, wanting, and goal seeking', *Annual Review of Psychology* 68, 2017, pp.353-381, p. 353.

⁷¹ Guinote, 'How power affects people', p.374.

⁷² E.g., David De Cremer and Eric Van Dijk, 'When and why leaders put themselves first: leader behaviour in resource allocations as a function of feeling entitled', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 35:4, 2005, pp.553-563.

⁷³ E.g., Nathaniel J. Fast, Niro Sivanathan, Nicole D. Mayer, and Adam D. Galinsky, 'Power and overconfident decision-making.' *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 117:2, 2012, pp.249-260.

⁷⁴ E.g, M. Ena Inesi, 'Power and loss aversion' *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 112:1, 2010, pp.58-69.

⁷⁵ E.g., Michelle M. Duguid and Jack A. Gancalo, 'Living large: the powerful overestimate their own height,' *Psychological Science* 23:1, 2013, pp.36-40.

⁷⁶ Deborah H. Gruenfeld, M. Ena Inesi, Joe C. Magee and Adam D. Galinsky, 'Power and the objectification of social targets,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95(1), 2008, pp.111-127.

use of power to satisfy individuals' own needs.⁷⁷ Studies of brain imagery have found that when power is socially primed, 'mirroring' neural processes, associated with empathy, are impaired.⁷⁸ In other words, power can literally go to one's head. Based on this research, Kelter submits that 'Lord Acton's thesis [that absolute power corrupts] has now been tested in hundreds of scientific studies, documenting what brief shifts in power do to our patterns of thought and action.'⁷⁹

Overall, these findings from psychology research robustly corroborate observations and expectations of scholars of political leadership, as well as political philosophers.⁸⁰ This research also reinforces the importance of context and situational factors – power does not lead to breaking bad for all leaders under all circumstances. Work in psychology does not, generally, look at the effects of being in power over time. Instead, the argument is a forceful one – at the moment one assumes a position of power over others, the psychological make-up of that individual changes. One might assume that these effects amplify over time, but there is little research directly on this issue.

Summarising Drivers of Breaking Bad

Based on the above research, Table 1 summarises what previous research suggests about changes in leaders over time, focusing only on possible negative developments, as that is the breaking bad core of this article. It is noteworthy that there are remarkable similarities across these different research programmes. Overconfidence, riskiness, and poor decision making, for example, are expected from multiple areas of research. This reinforces the point that these underlying drivers of leader change are complementary, not competitive, and perhaps have mutually reinforcing effects on leaders over time. It would be very difficult, although not impossible with some research designs, to tease out empirically the effects of these

⁷⁷ E.g., De Cremer and Van Dijk, 'When and why'. For additional review of psychological consequences of leadership power, see Benjamin G. Voyer and Bryan McIntosh, 'The psychological consequences of power on self-perception: implications for leadership,' *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal* 34:7, 2013, pp.639-660.

⁷⁸ E.g., Jeremy Hogeveen, Michael Inzlicht and Sukhvinder S. Obhi, 'Power changes how the brain responds to others,' *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 143:2, 2014, pp.755-762

⁷⁹ Keltner, *The Power Paradox*, p.99.

⁸⁰ On the history of political philosophers' attention to power's effects see Ricardo Blaug, *How Power Corrupts: Cognition and Democracy in Organisations*. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and Kellerman, *Bad leadership*.

drivers of leader personality change, but my purpose here is to note that these independent areas of research all suggest common trajectories in leaders.

[Table 1 about here]

Investigating Breaking Bad

This section discusses some of the challenges and possibilities for research on leaders breaking bad, building on the expectations from scholarship reviewed in the previous section. Whereas the previous section focused on what might prompt changes in leader personality and what those changes might be, the focus here is on how those bad changes can be operationalized. This section builds directly on previous work on poor decision making and policy fiascoes and mistakes, and on scholarship that has already grappled with some of the normative and empirical difficulties associated with judging leaders and policies as ‘bad’.

Indeed, classifying leaders and their behaviours as ‘bad’ raises several points of caution. It is best to avoid labelling leaders as either ‘good’ *or* ‘bad’. Bad leaders, after all, may do good things.⁸¹ And research on political leadership stresses that the effectiveness of individual personality traits is context and situationally-dependent – what is a ‘good’ characteristic in one situation may be ‘bad’ in another. Current approaches to political leadership thus avoid the tendency of earlier research that sought, and largely failed, to identify traits that would make for ‘good’ leaders.⁸² And any normative-motivated research faces the problems of bias – whilst some may see good in a certain leader, others might see bad, depending on political viewpoints.

Nevertheless, there can be broad agreement that some behaviours in leaders are less desirable than others. This assumption lies at the heart of traditions of research on

⁸¹ Kellerman, *Bad leadership*.

⁸² Margaret G. Hermann and Juliet Kaarbo, ‘Psychological approaches’, in Rudy Andeweg, Robert Elgie, Ludger Helms, Juliet Kaarbo and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel, eds., *The Oxford handbook of political executives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Kellerman, *Bad leadership*.

good judgment,⁸³ good governance and leadership,⁸⁴ and avoiding fiascos and policy mistakes.⁸⁵

I argue that it is possible to conceptualise leaders' traits and behaviour as bad, but that this must be done in context, and with specific operational indicators (developed out of established research traditions) in order to minimise problems of multiple meanings and subjectivity in determining bad. The goal is to find empirical expressions of 'badness' for the main insights (identified in Table 1) from previous research on changes in personality. Toward this end, I conceptualise badness at multiple tiers – at the level of the individual leader's characteristics, at the level of policymaking processes, and at the level of policy outcomes and policies (see Figure 1), and identify indicators of 'badness' at each tier. These tiers are specifically grounded in the work reviewed in the previous section and in work on poor decision making and policy mistakes. They are suggestive, but not exhaustive, of how future work on breaking bad is plausible.

I am not arguing that all the thorny normative and empirical problems associated with investigating bad leaders can be resolved. My aim is to clarify these issues around the topic of leader personality and organise a roadmap that can guide future research. I suggest that this can be done most effectively by breaking the effects of ageing, experience, learning, and power into three tiers for empirical study. I also suggest, following Kellerman,⁸⁶ that focusing on extreme levels of badness at each tier helps address some of the conceptual and normative challenges discussed above.

At the level of bad individual characteristics, all seven characteristics in the LTA framework match remarkably well with insights from the work reviewed previously for how leaders break bad. In other words, we can empirically capture and track over time how bad leaders are – how, for example, distrustful, self-confident, and simplistic they become. Although these traits might be functional and effective in many

⁸³ E.g., Stanley A. Renshon and Deborah Welch Larson, *Good judgment in foreign policy: theory and application* (Boston: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

⁸⁴ E.g., Ludger Helms, 'Beyond the great and glorious: researching poor leadership and bad governance in liberal democracies', *Journal for Comparative Government and European Policy* 10:4, 2012, pp.492-509; Kellerman, *Bad leadership*.

⁸⁵ E.g., Janis, *Victims*; Kai Oppermann and Alexander Spencer, 'Studying fiascos: bringing public and foreign policy together,' *European Journal of Public Policy* 23:5, 2016, pp.643-652; Stephen G. Walker and Akan Malici, *U.S. presidents and foreign policy mistakes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁸⁶ Kellerman, *Bad leadership*

contexts, work on poor decision making and bad leadership suggests that extreme levels are usually problematic. Also at this level, leaders' operational code beliefs, such as very strong beliefs that the nature of the political universe is very conflictual and that the best approach for pursuing goals is through conflict, can serve as indicators of when and how leaders can break bad.

Although LTA and OCA do not exhaustively cover all aspects of breaking bad at the level of individual characteristics (e.g., emotionality associated with ageing), there are many advantages of using LTA and OCA, at least as a first cut, as measures of leaders' breaking bad. They generally fit well with theoretical expectations in the research reviewed above (i.e., work on ageing, experience, learning, and power suggests something about one or more of the LTA characteristics and OCA beliefs) and they are very reliable and objective content analytic coding schemes, with the Profiler Plus automated coding system.⁸⁷ These techniques allow for temporal analysis, as characteristics and beliefs can be tracked with each speech act, or at other levels of aggregation. Critically, this research has generated a pool of leaders' profiles, so that we can compare leaders to a norming group to identify whether a leader is extreme. For each of the seven LTA traits and for key OCA beliefs, we can identify 'bad leaders' if they exhibit extreme values.

Identifying badness as expressed in policymaking processes is less systematic than with LTA and OCA methodologies. Expressions of badness can be observed through process-tracing case studies. This is a more qualitative approach, but several bad policymaking characteristics have been researched previously -- from, for example, older work on misperceptions⁸⁸ to newer research on emotions⁸⁹ -- and future research can build directly on those efforts. Previous work on rigidity,⁹⁰ lack of empathy,⁹¹

⁸⁷Klaus Brummer and Michael D. Young, 'Introduction: Decentering Leadership Profiling,' *International Studies Review*, doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa001. For more, see Hermann, 'Assessing leadership style' and Walker, Schafer and Young, 'Profiling the operational codes'.

⁸⁸ Jervis, *Perception*.

⁸⁹ Thomas M. Dolan, Jr., 'Go big or go home? positive emotions and responses to wartime success', *International Studies Quarterly* 60:2, 2016, pp.230-242.

⁹⁰ Jonathan W. Keller, 'Explaining rigidity and pragmatism in political leaders: a general theory and a plausibility test from the Reagan presidency', *Political Psychology* 30, 2009, pp.465-498.

⁹¹ Kellerman, *Bad leadership*; Stanley A. Renshon, 'Psychological Sources of Good Judgment in Political Leaders: A Framework for Analysis,' in Renshon and Larson, *Good judgment*, pp.25-57.

intemperance,⁹² over- or under-involvement in decision making,⁹³ positive illusions,⁹⁴ incompetence,⁹⁵ and policymaking expressions of hubris⁹⁶ offer clear definitions and good practice for identifying these policymaking characteristics. Sources for evidence for bad policymaking can be from a wide range of case study materials, including judgments of others at the time or, in hindsight, judgements from analysts after the fact; leaders' statements (ideally private), facts (policies, decisions, actions) that betray leaders' perceptions and emotions; and comparisons of leaders' expectations to actual outcomes.⁹⁷

Research on poor quality decision-making processes also gives us empirical indicators for assessing badness at this level. Schafer and Crichlow draw on Janis's work on groupthink to operationally define poor decision-making, as 'the failure to carry out certain basic decision-making tasks or carrying out these tasks in such a way that they will fail to meet...objective purposes.'⁹⁸ Elements of poor decision-making that can be empirically assessed through process tracing include biased leadership, lack of consultation of experts, poor information search, and failure to assess alternative options and the risks, costs and prospects for success of preferred options. While no decision-making processes are perfect and non-rational procedures may generate good policy outcomes, there is good evidence that poor processes are associated with poor outcomes.⁹⁹

The third tier of badness – bad policy choices and political outcomes -- captures potential, significant effects of changing leader personalities. This category covers what Helms defines as bad governance: 'bad policies (ill-conceived and/or poorly implemented) and bad outcomes of government policies for society.'¹⁰⁰ Many of these outcomes are included in existing data sets on politics and international relations and tend to be measured at the level of the state.

⁹² Dolan, 'Go big'; Kellerman, *Bad leadership*.

⁹³ Preston, *The president and his inner circle*; Saunders, 'No substitute'.

⁹⁴ Jervis, *Perception*; Johnson, *Overconfidence*.

⁹⁵ Kellerman, *Bad leadership*.

⁹⁶ Owen and Davidson, 'Hubris syndrome'.

⁹⁷ Dolan, 'Go big'; Johnson, *Overconfidence*.

⁹⁸ Schafer and Crichlow, *Groupthink*, p.68.

⁹⁹ Schafer and Crichlow, *Groupthink*.

¹⁰⁰ Helms, 'Beyond the great', p.907; italics in original have been removed.

Policies and outcomes that are generally agreed to be bad include extreme levels of conflictual behaviour, particularly inter-state wars and military interventions.¹⁰¹ While conflictual policies may be used for good (e.g., saving strangers), in modern normative and political contexts, aggression is often viewed as the choice of last result after other means have failed, and are therefore bad policies. Atrocities are another type of bad outcome, as a special category of aggression that include war crimes, genocide, and commitment of mass human rights violations.¹⁰² Kellerman's 'worst' leadership type (using Pol Pot as one example) is 'evil leadership', involving these types of acts.¹⁰³ Existing datasets on international and intrastate conflict, genocides, and atrocities capture the scale of these policies and outcomes at this tier.¹⁰⁴

Bad outcomes can also be characterised as 'mistakes', 'fiascos', or 'failures.' There is a sizable area of research that has investigated these in foreign policy,¹⁰⁵ although there is no agreed upon definition. Indeed, recent evaluations on conceptualising mistakes note that they are highly susceptible to hindsight bias and narrative construction and that there is great difficulty in assessing the causes of failures, however defined.¹⁰⁶ Despite the constructed nature of policy mistakes, it is worthwhile to try to empirically assess them at the outcome tier, given strong expectations that long-serving leaders are mistake-prone. McConnell's definition is a useful guide: 'a policy fails, even if it is successful in some minimal respects, if it does not fundamentally achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support is virtually non-existent.'¹⁰⁷

The three tiers of badness are not unrelated, but can be tracked independently. Bad leader characteristics are expected to generate bad policymaking processes and

¹⁰¹ Schafer and Crichlow, *Groupthink*.

¹⁰² Benjamin Valentino, *Final solutions: mass killing and genocide in the 20th century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

¹⁰³ Kellerman, *Bad leadership*.

¹⁰⁴ E.g., Charles H. Anderton and Jurgen Brauer, 'Datasets and Trends of Genocides, Mass Killings, and Other Atrocities,' in Charles H. Anderton and Jurgen Brauer, eds., *Economic aspects of genocides, other mass atrocities, and their prevention* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁵ E.g., Janis, *Victims*; Oppermann and Spencer, 'Studying fiascos'; Walker and Malici, *U.S. presidents*.

¹⁰⁶ Allan McConnell, 'A public policy approach to understanding the nature and causes of foreign policy failure', *Journal of European Public Policy* 23:5, 2016, pp.667-684; Oppermann and Spencer, 'Studying fiascos';

¹⁰⁷ McConnell, 'A public policy approach', p.671.

poor decision making is expected to produce bad policies and political outcomes, although the relationships are not always determinant. As Helms notes, ‘ineffective and inefficient leadership...may not always result in bad governance in terms of bad policies.’¹⁰⁸ Kellerman agrees: ‘The impact of incompetent leadership is highly variable. Sometimes...it leads to disaster. At other times, it amounts to mere bungling.’¹⁰⁹ There is, however, evidence suggesting that poor decision making processes are likely to generate poor outcomes.¹¹⁰ The effects of ageing, experience, learning, and power are also not determinant but can theoretically affect different tiers of badness either independently or indirectly.

Figure 1 depicts these three tiers of badness that can result from ageing, experience, learning and power. The previous section focused on how these drivers of change can affect leaders’ personality. This section, including Figure 1, offers a roadmap for investigating leaders breaking bad. By drawing on previous work, it demonstrates the plausibility of empirical work on this topic.

[Figure 1 about here]

Future Directions for Research

This article has provided a first cut at theorising and conceptualising how political leaders can become ineffective, and even dangerous, rulers over time. My goal was to systematically review what compelling, diverse and relevant areas of research can tell us about how leaders’ personalities change over time and in a particular, bad direction, to organise our thinking about changes in leaders in ways that have not been done previously, and to offer preliminary ideas on how ‘badness’ and its effects can be identified and tracked. Of course, different leaders and leaders in different cultural, political, situational, and institutional contexts may vary in their susceptibility, but my focus in this article was to provide the groundwork for investigations on the psychological drivers that research suggests may put many leaders at risk of breaking bad over time. Future research can build on this foundation and pursue specific questions on this topic. There are many possible research questions; I highlight four

¹⁰⁸ Helms, ‘Beyond the great,’ p.492.

¹⁰⁹ Kellerman, *Bad leadership*, p.40.

¹¹⁰ Schafer and Crichlow, *Groupthink*.

here, briefly noting some associated research strategies and some examples of leaders to investigate.

First, what are the patterns of breaking bad? One way of breaking bad is closed and inward-looking, when leaders become paranoid, insular, distrustful, suspicious and rigid (e.g. Nixon). A more outward-facing pattern would see leaders with excessive hubris, overconfidence, and grandiosity (e.g. de Gaulle). Both types of leaders may be highly power-motivated, but one type more for hoarding it and protecting their position, the other for making changes or dominating. Both types would likely make mistakes, but the nature of those mistakes may differ.

There are also different trajectories along which leaders' personalities can change. Some changes may happen only after a long time or at an older age, with 'badness' gradually accumulating (e.g. Ortega). Other changes in leaders may be more abrupt, such as with a significant event happening anytime during the leader's tenure (e.g. Carter's beliefs after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or Bush's beliefs after 9/11). It is also possible that some leaders begin bad and may exhibit bad behaviour from the start of their rule (e.g., Idi Amin), but even with these types of leaders, there is an interesting temporal element to investigate, as these leaders may become worse over time. Trump's distrust, need for power, and narcissism, for example, were extremely high at the start of presidency¹¹¹ but may have increased even more during his rule. And some leaders may hide their bad side at the beginning but over time, let their 'masks' slip, as some accuse Erdogan of doing. LTA and OCA profiling could identify these patterns of development, such as gradual or abrupt change toward extreme traits or beliefs.

Second, what are the policy effects of breaking bad? To address this question, leader tenure could be correlated with policy outcomes (such as conflict behaviour) and leader personality characteristics could be included to explore possible relationships and interaction effects between time served and, for example, self-confidence and

¹¹¹ Allesandro Nai and Emre Toros, 'The peculiar personality of strongmen: Comparing the Big Five and Dark Triad traits of autocrats and non-autocrats.' *Political Research Exchange* 2:1, 2020, pp.1-24. Stephen G. Walker, Mark Schafer, and Gary E. Smith, 'The operational codes of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Behavioral Political Science*, edited by Alex Mintz and Lesley Terris, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.1-24; David G. Winter, 'What does Trump really want?' *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 18:1, 2018, pp.155-171.

policy outcomes. Both case studies and large-n quantitative analyses would be appropriate strategies to pursue. Statistical analyses could use the basic tenure and age information included in the ARCHIGOS and LEAD¹¹² datasets, large collections of LTA and OCA profiles, and outcome datasets on, for example, militarized disputes.

Third, what are the most significant triggers to breaking bad? Case studies would be the most appropriate method to trace the evolution of leaders' personalities over time, identifying what changed (possibly using LTA and OCA profiles), the triggers for change, and the effects on policymaking processes and political and policy outcomes. To address this question, one could focus on only cases of suspected breaking bad leaders (e.g., Karadzic, Mugabe) or examine any case of long-serving leaders to explore the role of ageing, experience, learning and power. Cases could be selected to isolate the different drivers behind personality change, comparing, for example, the same long-serving leader at different points in time, experienced younger leaders (e.g., Jordan's Hussein halfway through his 47-year rule) with experienced older leaders (e.g., Reagan in his second term), or leaders who had repeated success (e.g. Blair) with those with repeated failures (e.g. Saddam Hussein).

Fourth, what personalities are more susceptible to breaking bad? To effectively address this question, cases could be chosen to compare leaders known or suspected to have 'broken bad' (e.g. Aung San Suu Kyi) with leaders who did not (e.g. Merkel). Are leaders who begin their rule with idealistic visions (e.g., Carter) more likely to become disillusioned? Does conceptual complexity (e.g., Obama) psychologically inoculate individuals from becoming overconfident? Do open leadership styles (e.g. Clinton) inhibit empathy loss?

An additional layer, beyond the focus of this article, to each of these questions concerns how leaders' changing personalities interact with their political, situational, and institutional contexts. With these questions and more, that are at the heart of leadership and foreign policy, research on breaking bad leaders is a worthy endeavor, given the little knowledge we have on this topic and the importance of investigating leaders over time. These leaders, and their personality characteristics, have considerable impact on the policies and politics of the states they rule, and international

¹¹² Henk E. Goemans, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Giacomo Chiozza, 'Introducing Archigos: a dataset of political leaders' *Journal of Peace Research* 46:2, 2009, pp.269-283; Ellis, Horowitz, and Stam, 'Introducing the LEAD data set.'

relations more broadly. Understanding how, when, and why some of them ‘break bad’ is a critical part of understanding their leadership.

Table 1
Breaking Bad Over Time: Key Expectations

Underlying Drivers	Potential Negative Effects
Ageing	Focus on holding power Conflating country and self Risk-prone Rigidity Emotional Cognitive impairment Conflictual policies
Experience	Over-confidence Top-down (hedgehog) information processing Risk-prone Directive leadership style which can foster groupthink
Learning	Beliefs changes toward conflictual views Higher belief in ability to control events Conceptual simplicity Closed to contradictory information and compromise Poor decision-making practices Expansionist, aggressive foreign policy
Power	High distrust Excessive self-confidence Hubris Lack of empathy, notions of superiority Self-serving behaviours Closed decision making Risk prone Policy mistakes Conflictual foreign policy

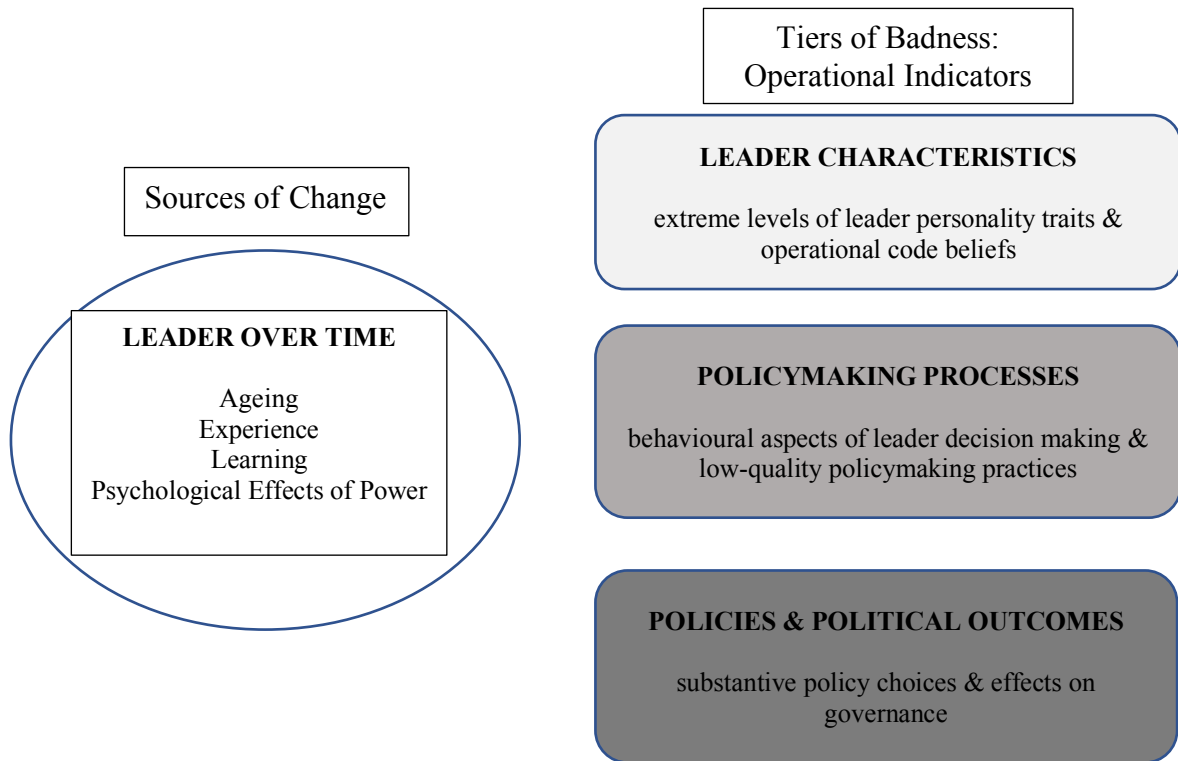


Figure 1
Leader Personality Breaking Bad: A Roadmap for Future Research